Leader Development
A Ministry of Presbyterian Life & Witness

SESSION DISCERNMENT AND DELIBERATION GUIDE

SEEKING THE MIND OF CHRIST TOGETHER

The purpose of this guide is not to determine who is right or wrong, nor simply to win a debate. Rather, it is to help the Session prayerfully discern where the Holy Spirit is leading the congregation. As Presbyterians, we believe that God speaks through Scripture, prayer, faithful conversation, the wisdom of the Church, and the work of the Holy Spirit among God's people.

STEP 1: FRAME THE QUESTION

Clearly state the issue as a question.

STEP 2: WHAT DOES SCRIPTURE SAY IN FAVOR?

Identify biblical passages, themes, principles, and stories that support the proposal under consideration.

Consider:

- Direct teachings
- Biblical examples
- Themes of justice, mercy, mission, stewardship, hospitality, discipleship, or evangelism

STEP 3: WHAT DOES SCRIPTURE SAY IN OPPOSITION?

Identify biblical passages, themes, principles, and stories that may caution against or challenge the proposal.

Consider:

- Potential risks
- Alternative biblical priorities
- Warnings from Scripture
- Concerns regarding stewardship, unity, tradition, or faithfulness

STEP 4: WHAT DOES SOCIETY SAY IN FAVOR?

Consider what community leaders, researchers, public institutions, cultural voices, and lived experiences suggest in support of the proposal.

STEP 5: WHAT DOES SOCIETY SAY IN OPPOSITION?

Consider concerns, critiques, risks, unintended consequences, and alternative viewpoints from the broader community.

STEP 6: WHAT DO CONTEMPORARY PEOPLE OF FAITH SAY IN FAVOR?

Review perspectives from modern theologians, pastors, church leaders, denominational statements, scholars, and faith-based organizations that support the proposal.

STEP 7: WHAT DO CONTEMPORARY PEOPLE OF FAITH SAY IN OPPOSITION?

Review perspectives from modern theologians, pastors, church leaders, denominational statements, scholars, and faith-based organizations that raise concerns or oppose the proposal.

STEP 8: PRAYER FOR DISCERNMENT

Before discussion begins, spend time in prayer.

STEP 9: HOLY CONVERSATION

During discussion:

☐ Listen before responding.
☐ Assume good intentions.
☐ Speak truthfully and respectfully.
☐ Be willing to learn.
☐ Distinguish facts from opinions.
☐ Consider the impact on the congregation and community.
☐ Seek understanding before seeking agreement.
☐ Make space for quieter voices.
☐ Remain open to being changed by what you hear.

STEP 10: PRESBYTERIAN DISCERNMENT AND POLITY REVIEW

As Presbyterians, we believe that discernment occurs within the covenant community and under the authority of Jesus Christ, who alone is Head of the Church. Before making a final decision, consider how the proposal aligns with our shared commitments as a congregation and as part of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

How does this proposal support the mission and ministry of our congregation?

Does this proposal align with the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), including the Book of Order and Book of Confessions?
☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure (Additional consultation needed)

How does this decision impact the faithful stewardship of our people, finances, facilities, & ministries?

How might this decision strengthen or weaken our witness to Christ in the community?

How will this decision affect the spiritual health and unity of the congregation?

Having prayed, studied Scripture, listened to one another, considered our context, & reviewed our constitutional responsibilities, where do we sense the Holy Spirit leading us?

STEP 11: DISCERNMENT AND DECISION

After prayerful discussion & constitutional review, what do we believe the Holy Spirit is calling us to do?

FINAL COVENANT OF DISCERNMENT

Before voting or concluding, ask:
Have we listened carefully to Scripture?
Have we fairly considered differing viewpoints?
Have we listened respectfully to one another?
Have we prayed sincerely for God's guidance?
Does this decision advance God's mission through our congregation?
Is this decision consistent with the Constitution of the PC(USA)?
Have we considered the impact on those most affected by this decision?
Can we support one another in Christian love, even when we disagree?

Amen.
"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight." — Proverbs 3:5
"The peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body." — Colossians 3:15